

## **Sermon, Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

**St Faith's, Quairading & Holy Trinity, York, 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 2021**

*Readings: Job 1:1, 2:1-10; Psalm 26; Hebrews 1:1-4, 2:5-12; Mark 10:2-16*

*Hymns: God has spoken by his prophets; My song is love unknown; Jesus loves me this I know; All hail the power of Jesus' name.*

It has been my privilege, and joy, since being ordained to have officiated at many marriages, a product of having ministered predominantly to university and school students. On Friday night I received a request (via the very modern communication of Facebook messenger) from a former student asking if I would marry him and his fiancé; Saturday week ago I officiated at the marriage of two young people (certainly young on the basis that the average age in Australia for a woman to marry is twenty-nine years, and a man, thirty-one years) in Holy Trinity Church, York. I have four marriages to solemnise between now and January of 2022 year.

In the many marriages I have conducted I am very mindful at the time of the declaration I make, after the bride and groom have exchanged vows and rings and promised lifelong faithfulness to each other, "... In the name of God, I declare them to be husband and wife. What God has joined together, let no one separate" that, within the congregation, there may well be those for whom this has proven sadly not true.

I mention this background about marriage for the statements made by Jesus Christ in our Gospel reading are quite strong as to the nature of divorce. Nonetheless, the Church has to some extent reconciled itself and its practice to understand that breakdown of marriage does take place, and that after investigation, and pastoral considerations, the Church permits the remarriage of divorced people. As some context to this, it is worth noting that while the divorce rate in Australia remains high, though declining in more recent years, research shows that for people for whom their Faith is central to their lives, divorce rates tend to be lower. In this regard, it might be argued that members of the Church can be a good example for others, and not least also because research shows that going through a divorce is not good for people's own physical and mental health, nor the broader quality of family, extended family, and the community's life. Notwithstanding that, we are aware that living in a loveless and/or abusive relationship or marriage is not acceptable also.

Within that context, our other readings set for today are invitations to each of us to endeavour to be people who live as fine a life as is possible, looking to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. The Book of Job, from where our first reading comes, is highly regarded as both a theological and literary masterpiece, and as I suspect you already know is an honest portrayal of God allowing a good person to suffer. In allowing Job's Faith to be challenged by Satan, God reveals, in the Book, his loving

sovereignty and the supremacy of divine wisdom over human wisdom. Nonetheless, the story of Job is not an easy read, for Job must suffer great torment, and it is a confronting exercise to reflect as to how well we might, or might not, remain faithful, if confronted by those circumstances inflicted upon Job. Our reading tells us that Job was a man, “blameless and upright, one who feared God, and turned away from evil; even God describes Job in such terms, recounting how Job is a person of integrity! In the passage read this morning, we learn how even when Satan afflicts Job with terrible sores, Job remains faithful to God. It is also suggested that receiving good and evil from God is possible, and as such has become cause for the study of the “Problem of Evil” and the explanations provided by various theodicies (ie, the vindication of divine providence in view of the existence of evil).

The Psalmist also reminds us of the wonderful power for good that is God. As with the story of Job, the Letter to the Hebrews, is another work written to encourage Christians in times of trial. It does this by focusing on the absolute supremacy of God, and the sufficiency of belief in Jesus Christ. We are invited by the unknown writer from 60-70 AD to ensure that with our Faith, and in our everyday living, we should imitate the example of Christ, and those within the honour roll of the Faith. In the passage appointed for today we are reminded that while during history God has spoken to his people through prophets, we must look to his Son, for he is the heir of all things, it is he who through whom creation is made, whose radiance is the glory of God, and he is not only superior to the angels, but more excellent than them.

Once again suffering is portrayed as being a foundation for Faith; indeed, Christ’s death leads to his crowning with glory and honour, and thereby all things being brought into perfection. This example of Christ is ever before us, it is our help, shield, and our hope; just as people such as Job ought to be an encouragement in our Faith journey. As such, it may be that these examples of faithfulness to God, might suggest why those of deeper Faith are better able to make marriage work and be sustained.

Finally, in our Gospel reading, we have three verses about children, and we may wonder why these observations were joined together with the teaching about divorce. In these verses, Jesus once again emphasises his desire to welcome children, and reiterates his stance that to be part of the Kingdom of God we need to be childlike, which might suggest a certain innocence, hopefulness, and willingness to listen, and to be lead. Perhaps growing up, and becoming too worldly wise, is the problem adults have; we become more of this world, and lose the simplicity that comes from being Faithful unto God.

Let us therefore go out, whatever our circumstances, seeking God’s blessing upon our lives, that we might be as Christ like as he would wish us to be, so we can attempt to be blameless and upright under God’s Grace; recognising that we are no Job or Jesus, but that we can through true repentance be reconciled to God, and that through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are people of the Great Hope that is the Good News of Jesus Christ.